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An anthropological perspective on the mosque in Pakistan

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Abstract

The mosque occupies a central position in the social as well as religious life of Muslims. It is not only a place of worship where rituals are performed, but also serves as a social space where Muslims take part in welfare activities. The design and architecture of the mosque have local as well as global influences, representing religious, economic, and esthetic dimensions of Muslim social organization. Therefore, Muslims' association with the mosque has much significance from social, political, and economic perspectives. Based on an ethnographic example, this report aims to highlight the use of mosque space in the cultural context of rural Pakistan. In addition to discussing the sociospatial relationships around the mosque, I discuss how Muslims' beliefs about the world and the afterlife shape these relationships.

Keywords

Mosques; Pakistan; Muslims; sociospatial relationships; welfare

Introduction

Because Pakistan's national identity and political dynamics are intertwined with Islam, the mosque may be interpreted as a national symbol of the country. For example, the Badshahi Mosque is used as a source for celebrating the "glorious past" of Muslims in South Asia while the Faisal Mosque in Islamabad, with its modernist architecture, may represent the vision of a bright and modernistic future for the country. The former was built in Lahore by the Mughal Emperor Aurangzeb in the seventeenth century, whereas the latter's construction was completed in 1986. Such an association with the mosque's design and structure highlights the strong correlation of culture and religion.

An increasing number of studies have been carried out by social scientists regarding the role of the mosque in social welfare as well as in ethnic and religious politics. Recent social and political analyses of the mosque have mainly been carried out in the West (e.g. Naylor and Ryan 2002; Gale 2004; Cesari 2005; Jamal 2005; McLoughlin 2005; Avcioglu 2007; Ahmed 2014). This increasing interest in studying the mosque is due to the complicated relationship between minority Muslim communities and the non-Muslim majority populations in Western countries; however, it reiterates the vital place the mosque occupies for Muslims (cf. Qureshi 1990; Parkin and Headley 2000; Frishman and Khan 2002; Abdel-Hady 2010; Zaheer 2011). On the contrary, anthropologists have paid less attention to the mosque and its importance in socialization processes in non-Western countries, including Pakistan.

In this report, I explore, through an ethnographic example, how the mosque occupies a central position in Muslim social organization in Pakistani society. I discuss the mosque as a space around which social relationships are maintained. These social relationships are mediated by religion, and are dynamically adjustable in changing circumstances. I discuss how the specific ways of using mosque space point to Muslims' attitudes toward the world and the afterlife, as defined by their belief systems. The world and the afterlife are two interrelated concepts in Islamic beliefs and cosmologies, which represent a fundamental model of time-space. The "social practice" (Bourdieu 1977, 72, 1984, 170) of beliefs about the world and the afterlife is expressed in the construction and management of the mosque. I also discuss how such cultural practices as social welfare are mediated by religion, whereby the mosque becomes an agency to take up this role.

Since culture itself is a space, as Kokot (2007, 12–13) notes, social organization around a space can be regarded as a spatial event (Smith 1971, 56). Therefore, culture is a nexus of dynamic sociospatial relationships (Giddens 1984, 1991, 17–20; Rapoport 1994; Bennardo 2009). With this understanding, I will discuss the association of Pakistani Muslims with the mosque and how they use mosque space, in the context of one particular rural community.

Studying the mosque

The “anthropology of Islam” has studied how ordinary Muslims perceive and understand scriptures and practice Islam in their everyday lives. However, there have been some debates, which still remain unresolved, over whether anthropology should study Islam and Muslims in relation to text and scriptures or should study primarily the lived experience of Muslims in local social and cultural contexts (see el-Zein 1977; Eickelman 1982; McLoughlin 2007; Marsden and Retsikas 2013). Some anthropologists have proposed the study of Muslim groups at the village or tribe level in relation to larger historical and ideological frames of Islam (Ahmed 1986a). This demands that Muslim groups or Islam itself be studied by scholars, either Muslims or non-Muslims, who are committed to the universalistic principles practiced in Islam, such as tolerance and knowledge. This value-based approach seems to contrast with the objective and scientific study of cultures. However, it has been argued that all kind of ideological anthropologies, such as Marxist, feminist, or applied, are to at least some extent value-based (Tapper 1995). Asad (1986) has argued that the concept of “tradition” is helpful in studying Islam. This is so because narratives of tradition vary: no universally acceptable account of tradition exists, and “tradition” always is subject to the historical position of those studying it.

Why have mosques in Pakistan not been studied much by anthropologists? Firstly, anthropological studies of Pakistan have mainly centered on kinship, marriage, and other forms of social networks that are based on power hierarchies and economic relations in rural areas (see Eglar 1960; Ahmad 1977; Ahmed 1980; Donnan 1988; Naveed-i-Rahat 1990; Lyon 2004; Chaudhary 2010).¹ Anthropologists have focused on these domains mainly as a continuity of the colonial tradition in which kinship and patron-client relationships have been regarded as the core part of rural social organization (cf. Mathur 2000). While these studies have rightly pointed out the importance of these cultural aspects, it became a reason for overlooking some other important features of Pakistani society (Mughal 2014a).

Secondly, anthropologists have tended to focus on shrines in Pakistan rather than on mosques because of shrines’ significance in the rural economy and their strong link with Sufism (e.g. Werbner 2010; Frembgen 2011). Although shrines are integral to Pakistani social organization, too much emphasis on them has caused the role of the mosque, including within Sufi practices, to be overlooked by anthropologists.

Thirdly, in the wake of 9/11, governments and scholars from different disciplines have shown interest in studying Muslim social organization with regard to religious extremism. More dominant voices in political discourse analyze Islamic institutions like the mosque and *madrasa* (religious school) with respect to their perceived role in propagating religious extremism.² This is an over-simplification of current political dynamics in the world (cf. Malik 2008), often involving incoherent and flawed analyses of Islam and Muslim societies (Varisco 2005). These views on the mosque and *madrasa* have been contested by alternative perspectives in light of their role in charity, social welfare, and religious coexistence (e.g. Al-Krenawi and Graham 2000; Clark 2004; Al-Jayyousi 2012). Such studies have led researchers to explore the social meanings of religion in Muslim lives. There is a good deal of literature in contemporary political and social sciences about the role of *madrasa*; however, the role of the mosque in Muslim social organization still needs to be elaborated upon. It must be noted that not all mosques are linked with *madrasas*, and therefore can be studied independently.

The mosque

The word “mosque” is the Anglicized form of the Arabic word *masjid*. There are no reliable sources to confirm how and when the word “mosque” started being used in English. It has been suggested that the word adopted different forms in Greek, Italian, and Spanish before its widespread use in its current form in English, probably during the eighteenth century (see Frishman and Khan 2002; Woodlock 2010, 266). The word *masjid* means the place where prostrations before Allah are performed, an essential part of Muslim prayer. Muslims believe through *hadiths* (traditions of the Prophet) the whole earth is made a mosque. It is not uncommon for Muslims to offer their daily prayers while travelling in planes, ships, buses, and other vehicles, without a need for a specific structure designed to serve as a mosque. Nonetheless, Muslims are encouraged to build and attend mosques, which are believed to be the “House of Allah.” Although Muslims can offer prayers at their homes, it is preferable for men to come to the mosque to pray in the *jama’at* (congregation).

Muslims offer their five times’ daily prayers, the weekly Friday prayer (to be offered only in big mosques: one cannot offer it alone), and additional *traaviah* prayers (offered by Sunnis and Ahl-e-Hadith) in the mosque during the fasting month of *Ramazan*. Eid congregational prayers are also held in big mosques twice a year. It should be mentioned that *musalla*, a

small place dedicated on a temporary basis to prayers, is different from the mosque. In Pakistani villages, a *musalla* is constructed in the fields so that farmers can offer their prayers while at work. *Musalla* can be used for other purposes after they are no longer used for offering prayers. On the contrary, according to Islamic principles, after an area is formally designated as a mosque it must remain so until the end of the world.

Masjid al-Haram in Mecca, where the Ka'ba is located, and Masjid-e-Nabwi or Al-Masjid al-Nabwi (the Mosque of the Prophet) are the holiest sites in Islam. Masjid-e-Nabwi was built by the Prophet in Medina and was used as a place of worship, strategic planning, political discussions, learning, and spirituality (Qureshi 1990; Frishman and Khan 2002). This mosque has served as a model for all the mosques in the following centuries until now throughout the Islamic world. Many scholars agree that some of the structures present in most mosques today such as the *mehraab* (a circular niche directing toward Ka'ba where the imam stands to lead the prayer) and the courtyard follow the model of the Mosque of the Prophet (Al Hamad 2006; Abdelrahman 2010). In most Muslim societies, some unique features of the mosque make it distinct from other buildings in an area (Aazam 2007; Kahraman 2012; Waijitrtragung 2012). Features such as domes and minarets are typical, although not universal, and have become an essential part of Islamic symbolism today. Some of these structures, such as domes, were not present in early mosques but were later developed as Islam spread to different societies (Al Hamad 2006; Mustafa and Hassan 2013). Domes were added to mosque structure for acoustic and temperature-control purposes. Scholars and historians believe that the minaret is also a later addition. A large number of studies have been carried out by architects and others in order to understand the rationale behind mosque structure in different cultural and geographical contexts (Aazam 2007; Avcioglu 2007; Hamid, Mikhail, and Estamboli 2012; Baharudin and Ismail 2014). Such analyses are useful in understanding the diversification in mosque design and architecture in different times and places.

Currently, various political and cultural debates exist regarding the mosque. These include, but are not limited to, mosque administration or imams, religious extremism and sectarianism, and women's access to the mosque. Most of these issues have arisen in the West, with the exception of debates regarding the role of the mosque with reference to sectarianism. Economic and political alienation of Muslim immigrants have led to conflicts between Muslim minorities and non-Muslim majorities in Western countries (Modood et al. 1997). Recent studies in the West have focused on the role of imams and mosques in terms of

dialogues over ethnicity, multiculturalism, and religious extremism. For instance, the assumption that some Muslim youth are involved in extremist activities has led to conclusions that imams should be trained in such a way that they realize the needs of Muslims in the West with respect to multiculturalism (Lewis 2006; Ahmed 2014). This is because most of these imams are recent migrants from Muslim-majority countries where they may not have ever faced the challenges of multi-faith societies.

Mosque administration models vary in different countries. For instance, governments in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates construct mosques and are responsible for appointing imams as well as providing their salaries and other management expenses. In most cases, such as on Eid and Friday prayers, religious sermons are approved by authorities before being delivered. In South Asia, including Pakistan, except for big mosques like the Badshahi Mosque, whose imams are appointed by the government, local communities appoint imams and are involved in the day-to-day management of the mosque. In Pakistan, a mosque usually takes its name with reference to its location or the *biraderi* (clan or kinship circle; see Donnan 1988; Lyon 2004) living by it. Almost all the mosques in Pakistan belong to specific *masaalik* (schools of thought) such as Sunni or Shia.³

Sectarian violence in Pakistan is caused by the hostile configuration of different groups with one another. For instance, in the conflicts between Shias and Sunnis, a vast majority of violence has occurred between Wahabis or Ahl-e-Hadith, who are also considered Sunnis according to one definition, and Shias. Another conflict between Shias and Sunnis is that of between the former and Deobandis. Deobandis are one of the two major Sunni groups in Pakistan, the other being Barelvis. Deobandi and Barelvi are religious movements within the Hanafi branch of Sunni Islam, having their roots in British India during the nineteenth century. Deobandis are sometimes labeled as Wahabis; they also oppose Barelvis in their act of veneration of saints and shrine festivals. Barelvis are closer to, or in fact are, Sufis. It has been argued that Shia-dominant Iran and Wahabi-dominant Saudi Arabia have funded Shia and Wahabi *madrasas*, respectively, or at least have been core actors behind recent waves of sectarianism in Pakistan (Abou Zahab and Roy 2004; Hasan 2011). Although statistics vary, it is beyond any doubt that the majority of Pakistanis is Barelvis and practice Sufism. This report is based on a Barelvi community in Pakistan.

In most Muslim countries, particularly in traditional Sunni societies, women do not offer prayers in the mosque but they do it at home (see Sayeed 2001). Some women in Pakistan do visit mosques, particularly those of Ahl-e-Hadiths and Shias, located in offices and residential areas of big cities, to offer their prayers. Generally, for Barelvis, mosque space is used by men, with a few exceptions. In many parts of Pakistan, women also attend traditional shrine festivals (Werbner 2010). In all such religious gatherings men and women have chances to mingle; however, specific arrangements are made to ensure some level of gender segregation. Most scholars agree that women were allowed to access the Mosque of the Prophet during the Prophet's time. There are traditions of the Prophet advising that women can offer their prayers in the mosque, albeit in the rows behind men and boys. It was not until the time of Caliph Umar that women were discouraged from offering prayers in the mosque. Since Sunnis follow their respective jurisprudence according to which women are not generally supposed to visit the mosque, this has been less of a concern in the countries where Sunnis are in majority. However, women's access to the mosque is an emerging debate in the West (see Brown 2008).

The study setting and methodology

This report is part of an ethnographic project in a Pakistani village, Jhokwala, in Lodhran District. Fieldwork was carried out in 2010 from January until the end of October. I spent most of my time in this village and also visited nearby villages and Lodhran City intermittently to collect relevant information. Information used here comes from participant observations, interviews, and informal discussions. Since I was doing "anthropology at home" (cf. Peirano 1998; Mughal, in press), I was aware of the local norms and values in the field area; for instance with regard to religious sensitivities. Some information in this report, particularly about local terminologies, is also the result of my personal understanding and experience of working in different areas of Pakistan.

The entire population of Jhokwala is Barelvi. It is located in the southern part of Punjab, where Saraiki is the main language. Urdu, as the national language of Pakistan and mother tongue of a sizable population of migrants from Bhiwani, India, settled here after Partition in 1947, is also understood and spoken widely. The religious terminology used in Pakistan is normally of Persian and Arabic origin because most of the classic Islamic literature in South Asia exists in these languages. There are several *biraderis* or *qaums* (tribes; communities)

residing in Jhokwala. *Biraderi* can roughly be translated as clan or kinship circle and it encompasses the concepts of social obligations of kin (see Donnan 1988; Lyon 2004).

Over the last few decades, there has been a tremendous population growth in the village. Consequently, there is a shortage of land available for agriculture. This has given rise to occupational change as many people have abandoned agriculture and are now working in cities or overseas as laborers. This has resulted in a shift from an agricultural to the market economy (Mughal 2014b). To maximize production, agricultural intensification has taken place alongside the use of modern machinery. In order to find alternative economic opportunities, there has been an emphasis on modern education. Although women from poor families used to work in agricultural fields previously, almost all families are now educating their girls in schools. Factories have started running in the area. One important factor in speeding up the pace of urbanization in Jhokwala has been its location at a highway junction, providing access to nearby cities. Although electricity was introduced in the village a few decades ago, the effects of globalization started being noticeable only in the last decade, with the use of household electrical appliances, mobile phones, television, and the internet.

There are two mosques in the village: the Noori Mosque and the second one that is sometimes referred to as *chhoti* (small) mosque. Another small mosque is also located in a factory adjacent to the village, which is used by the factory workers. Although the fieldwork was carried out mainly in the village, several other mosques in nearby villages and Lodhran City were also visited. I will discuss these shortly, but first I will explain some terminology related to the world and the afterlife.

The mosque as a connection between the world and the afterlife

As in all Muslim societies, a very basic and important concept of time and space in Jhokwala is derived from the Islamic notions of *dunya* (the world) and *aakhrat* (the afterlife). The world not only encompasses spatial attributes, it is also a time people live in over a large scale or duration, from the past as the time of the creation of the universe to the future that is expressed through the notion of the Day of Judgment. The concept of *dunya* represents this-worldly past, present, and future while *aakhrat* represents the otherworldly future. The world is a time-space where humans interact with each other and with nature. Their good or bad deeds in the world will be judged in the afterlife and they will be rewarded with *jannat*

(heaven; paradise) or *jahannum* or *dozakh* (hell) accordingly. Therefore, the type of life one will have in the afterlife depends upon one's deeds in the world (cf. Ahmed 1986b; Hussain 2009). Good deeds are accumulated as merit, whereas bad deeds are accumulated as sin. If one earns more merit by practicing good deeds, one will be rewarded with *jannat* in the afterlife. *Jannat* is a place where there will be no suffering and will be full of luxuries, servants, nice foods, and palaces. It will be a reward for the people who believe in and worship Allah, refrain from sins, and practice good deeds (*khair*). Good deeds are not just limited to performing rituals:

Merely offering prayers is not a big virtue. Offering prayer, *hajj* (pilgrimage to Mecca), and fasting are the debts that a human being has to return to Allah. This is *imaan* (faith). Islam is not just a faith; it has two parts: *imaan* and *ehsaan*. *Ehsaan* means that one must serve the creatures of Allah. And human beings are not the only creatures. There are eighteen thousand *jinns* (species) such as birds and animals – all are the creatures of Allah. One has to serve them. A human being should spend time for these things in life [to get reward from Allah]. (Khuda Bukhsh, 75)⁴

If one has earned more sins in this life, one will be sent to *jahannum* in the afterlife. *Jahannum* is a place full of suffering that is meant to be for disbelievers, sinners, and those who do not perform good deeds. However, one may ask for repentance; to ask Allah for forgiveness and promise not to commit the sin again. Sometimes, compensation for sin, such as giving charity or performing certain rituals, is also offered as repentance. For example, it is believed if one performs *hajj* pilgrimage to Mecca, one's sins are forgiven by Allah's mercy. This backward movement from sin to purity and from hell to heaven, until a person commits the sin again, represents a time reversal in an individual's life (see Werbner 2003, 106). However, one cannot know in one's life if one's sins have been forgiven.

Muslims believe that all humans will be judged on the Day of Judgment for the deeds they had performed in the world. A wealthy person (*dunya waala*) or one who only cares for the world and spends life in worldly affairs (*dunya daar*) is seen as opposite to a religious person (*deen daar*). However, in order to earn merit, one should not spend one's entire time in rituals only. According to Islamic teachings, there are two types of rights: the rights of Allah and those of fellow humans. The rights of Allah are fulfilled through performing religious rites whereas the rights of fellow humans are fulfilled through serving humanity. An ideal Muslim thus takes care of both of these rights.

The design and architecture of the mosque

The practice of peace, purity, and sacredness is manifested in the construction and design of the mosque. During my fieldwork, I spent time in several mosques in Jhokwala and nearby villages. These share many aspects of their architecture and design with most Pakistani mosques. As discussed earlier, the design and architecture of the mosque make it distinctive from the buildings around it. The color green is prominent in mosques in Jhokwala, in nearby villages, and in all the Bareilvi mosques in Pakistan. Both the mosques in Jhokwala have a *mehraab*, a circular niche indicating the direction (*qibla*) that a Muslim should face while offering prayer. The *mehraab* of the Noori Mosque is not visible from outside as there are some houses attached to the *qibla* wall of the mosque. However, the *qibla* direction from the Noori Mosque can be reckoned from outside through the obvious direction of decoration and arches on the rooftop of its prayer hall. Some verses of the Qur'an are written on the inner and outer walls of the prayer hall in Islamic calligraphy.

The Noori Mosque consists mainly of concrete; the floors are concrete and carpeted in the prayer hall. Before its reconstruction some twelve years ago, it was a mixed concrete and mud structure just as the *chhoti* mosque still is now. Although there are more decorations on the walls of the Noori Mosque, there is not much difference in both these mosques in terms of architecture. They share most features of what I call a typical Pakistani or at least a Bareilvi mosque in Pakistan. In both these mosques, ceiling fans are fitted inside the hall. Fans are also fitted in the courtyard with the help of iron rods. Prayers are offered in the courtyard during moderate weather. At the entrance gate, there is an empty space distinct from the rest of the floor, where people take their shoes off. Next to this area is the ablution place. In the Noori Mosque, two toilets are attached to this area. The mosque has minarets, with a loudspeaker fitted in one of them. The *moazzan* (one who recites the call to prayer) used to recite the call to prayer (*azaan*) without a loudspeaker by standing on a wall of the mosque. Villagers said they could hear the call to prayer without a loudspeaker over long distances:

There were no loudspeakers before electricity was introduced in the village. Our fathers and grandfathers never had this in Bhiwani. It came just now... [Before that] we could hear the voice of the *moazzan* from a long distance – for miles and miles. It used to be silence everywhere. Now as you see, it is noise everywhere – the noise of vehicles, factories, and TV. We could even recognize which *moazzan* was reciting *azaan*. (Rao Hanif, 90)



Figure 1. The gate of the Noori Mosque. © The Author.

There were debates among scholars about whether or not loudspeakers should be used in the mosque when they were introduced in the early twentieth century in South Asia (Khan 2011). However, there has been no resistance to the use of loudspeakers in the mosque when it was introduced a few decades ago to these rural areas for the first time, as I was told by elderly people, because the use of loudspeakers had already been widespread in cities. The use of loudspeakers has expanded the boundaries of mosque space. I observed many instances when an announcement was made on the loudspeaker and people paid attention to it, taking a break for the moment from whatever they were doing – for instance, they stopped playing music on their mobile phones upon hearing the *azaan*. Since the use of loudspeakers and watches has increased over time,⁵ people who regularly offer prayers in a mosque predict the time of *azaan* and start preparing for that prayer. The loudspeaker is not merely used for *azaan* but for other announcements, for example about funeral timings.

The sociospatial relationships around mosque space

One day, I and Sajjad, one of my friends in the village, went to meet Hanif Ahmed, the imam of the chhoti mosque. We discussed the history of Jhokwala, his childhood, and the Sufi saint, Khwaja Ghulam Farid. After an hour, the *azaan* for *Asar*, afternoon prayer, was recited on the loudspeaker of the mosque. After entering the mosque, we took our shoes off near the gate in the dedicated space where shoes are kept, and performed ablution. There were some twenty men and boys in the *jama'at*. Men were standing in the front rows behind the imam whereas boys were in the back row. Nobody was looking at or talking to each other during congregation. However, before *jama'at* started, two boys were playing, and a man asked them not to do so. During congregation, everyone followed the imam's verbal command, which was not more than a couple of words, to perform particular steps in segments of prayer collectively. *Jama'at* finished with everybody looking first at his right and then left shoulders, known as *salaam*. People started chanting the names of Allah in their heart or in a lower voice after that. After a few minutes, the imam raised his hands for *dua* (prayer) and everyone followed him by uttering the word *Aameen* (Amen) at regular intervals. After the *dua* was finished, people started leaving the mosque. The prayer took about ten minutes for the whole congregation to complete. Some men started talking outside the mosque near the gate, breaking the silence observed inside. Sajjad was talking to a shopkeeper. I joined them to have a conversation about the latter's work.



Figure 2. The courtyard of the small mosque in the village. © The Author.

I asked men why women do not come to the mosque to offer their prayers. They identified two major reasons. Firstly, although Islam does not restrict a woman to visit the mosque to offer her prayers, Muslims of the early era after the Prophet abandoned this practice, and it is today customary in almost all the Sunni mosques in Pakistan and many other countries that women offer their prayers only at home. Secondly, there are various cultural notions of *izzat* (honor or prestige) associated with women in the context of Pakistan. Women are considered as the *izzat* of their family and a woman is obliged to protect her honor by keeping her modesty. If, for example, someone misbehaves toward a woman in the mosque, it will result in a conflict, which is not good given the sacredness of the mosque. Since women's inaccessibility to the mosque is not seen as a problem in Pakistan that needs resolution, women's response to this question was no different from that of men. This issue can further be understood through the practice of *purdah* (veiling) and gender segregation in most spheres of human activity in rural Pakistan. Almost all rituals and ceremonies such as marriage and death are normally gender-segregated in the village.

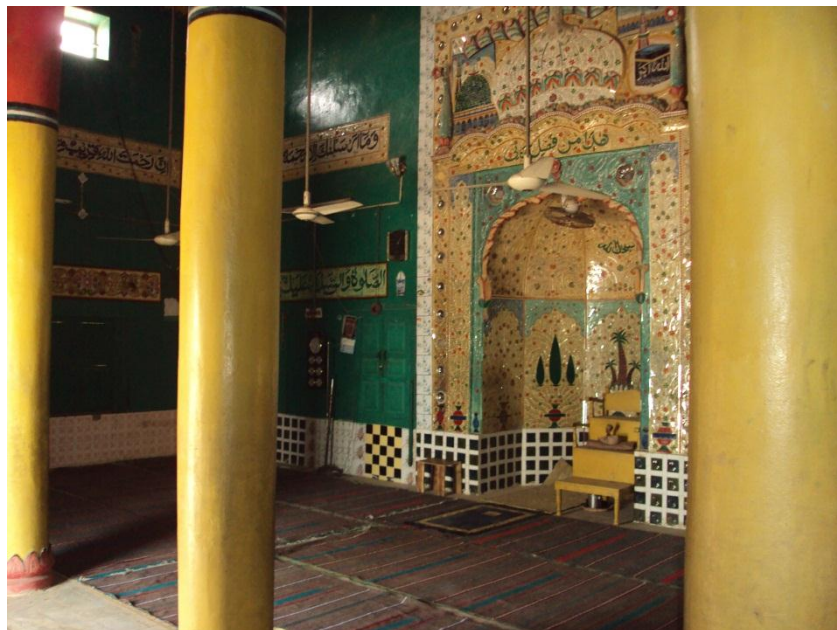


Figure 3. Prayer Hall in the Noori Mosque. © The Author.

The mosque and welfare

Charity is fundamental to welfare in Islam. *Zakaat*, distributing alms to the poor, is one of the five basic pillars of the religion. Spending money on and giving charity to fellow human beings according to one's economic circumstances is a religious obligation and serves to strengthen social bonds (cf. Al-Krenawi and Graham 2000; Weiss 2002; Clark 2004). Although *zakaat* is not regulated through mosques in Pakistan, many other forms of social welfare are institutionalized through the mosque, for instance, the discussion of community problems (Lee 2010; Ahmed 2014). Being the House of Allah and a central place in religious organization, Muslims actively take part in the construction and management of the mosque, and I was told that spending money for the House of Allah is better than spending it on worldly affairs or one's own home. If one constructs a House of Allah in this world, one will be rewarded with a house in heaven in the afterlife, it is said. In this way, people consider such donations to the mosque as an investment that will bring fruit in the afterlife.

Both mosques in Jhokwala were constructed through funds raised mainly from within the village. Residents of the village also donate money to the mosques monthly, weekly on Fridays, or whenever they can afford to do so. This money is used for repairing the mosque, purchasing items such as carpets, or paying the imam's stipend or the mosque's electricity bills. A *mutawalli* (mosque administrator) is responsible for maintaining the budget and taking caring of the mosque affairs with the help of a few volunteers from the village, forming a mosque committee. A *mutawalli* is a person whom people can trust and who has a good reputation in the village. The mosque has always played a significant role during times of risk and hazards in different parts of the world (Cheema 2012; Mohit et al. 2013). In August 2010, there were heavy floods in different parts of Pakistan. A huge number of people were left without any shelter, food and medical aid and the government and nongovernmental agencies started relief efforts. One day, I was interviewing some children in a school when an announcement was made on the Noori Mosque's loudspeaker:

The flood has caused destruction in the country. Thousands of people have gone on their journey to the afterlife and hundreds of thousands have become homeless. Considering the current times of *azmaaish* [a test by Allah], help the flood-affected Muslims. Donate money, food, clothes, beds, and medicines with an open heart. Remember to hand in your things only to responsible people and get your receipt. May Almighty Allah protect the life, properties, *izzat*, and honor of every Muslim in Pakistan and in the world! Those Muslims who died in these floods, may Allah bless them. In addition, those who had any [economic] loss, may Almighty Allah

compensate their loss soon. *Aameen!* Again *Aameen!* *Zakaat*, *sadqa*, and *khairaat* (alms and charity) in the form of cash, medicines or in kind that you want to donate, there are volunteers present in the mosque [who will receive these things]. Bring it yourself or ask your children to bring it into the mosque as soon as possible to earn merit (*sawaab*).

After a few minutes, people started donating cash and other items of household consumption at the mosque. Each donation was announced over the loudspeaker. The man who was making these announcements was also praying for the people who were donating, keeping their names anonymous in most cases:

“A *musaafir* (traveller who is not native) has donated a hundred rupees. May Allah bless him for this charity! May Allah bless peace to his family and relieve them from any suffering they have! A little child has given fifty rupees. May Allah provide his family peace from any suffering they have.” These announcements about the flood continued for several days. This shows that the mosque is not just a place for rituals but for good deeds (*khair*) as well.

Discussion and conclusion

There has been very little research available on the mosque in non-Western contexts. Sustained analysis of the mosque as a place, organization, and institution involving various cultural contexts has only recently started to emerge in anthropology. However, without understanding the specific roles of and association of people with the mosque, studies on Muslim societies can lead to out-of-context generalizations – for example linking Muslims with extremism and terrorism in the West, and overlooking the mosque as a representation of the vital aspect of Muslim social organization linked with social welfare, peace, and spirituality. This report has aimed at highlighting these under-researched aspects of the mosque in Pakistan.

Studying mosque space can reveal some new dimensions of sociospatial and cultural cosmological dimensions in Muslim societies. While there are strict religious prescriptions about respect, purity, and sacredness of the mosque, these are expressed within a wide cultural spectrum throughout the Muslim world. These may be dependent upon ideologies of different religious schools of thought, local economic conditions, and cultural aspects of a community. For anthropologists, the mosque can serve as an alternative to private places having minimal access for outsiders such as the house, in order to study sociospatial

relationships. For these reasons, ethnography of the mosque can use the conventional methods of social research and trigger new reflexive and conceptual queries.

The mosque occupies a central position in Muslim religious and social organization. Although mostly assumed to be linked with prayers, the mosque has not been used by Muslims as a place where only rituals are performed (cf. Qureshi 1990; Frishman and Khan 2002; Jamal 2005; Zaheer 2011). Muslims also use the mosque for learning and socialization purposes. I have shown that the mosque serves as a place of worship and of welfare and thus acts for Muslims as a connection between the world and the afterlife.

Muslims have always paid special attention to the design and structure of the mosque because of its social, religious, political, and intellectual importance (Blair and Bloom 2003; Hamid, Mikhail, and Estamboli 2012). The design and architecture of the mosque in Pakistan is indicative of ritual, social, and economic aspects of Muslim life. Its structure highlights the notions of purity and religious symbolism such as the color green and the inscription of Qur'anic verses. Many contemporary designs and architectural aspects of the mosque have developed over time. The design and architecture of the mosque represent local as well as global facets of Muslim life. As noted by architects and researchers elsewhere (Othman and Zainal-Abidin 2011; Kassim, Abdullah, and Taib 2014), the design of the mosque satisfies the artistic interests and esthetics of Muslim communities. The structure of the contemporary mosques, while using the Mosque of the Prophet as a model, has been subject to change throughout history, being inspired from local and global architectural developments. The use of a loudspeaker for the call to prayer has given a new dimension to the sociospatial organization of the mosque. Its boundaries are now virtually extended as an oral space with the use of the loudspeaker, which engages people from a distance. On the one hand, it is indicative of social change while showing the impact of technology in religious practices over time on the other.

There are certain rules of etiquette that one must follow in the mosque. In Pakistani society, specific kinship and gender roles as well as religious beliefs play a role in how people use mosque space. Although women have not been accessing mosques because of jurisprudence and local cultural factors, it does not seem to be a permanent situation. The possible eventual admission of women can be predicted on the basis of different religious movements that have been occurring within different schools of thought in Islam, and social change in the form of

educating girls in schools with mixed gender facilities. The nature of their access to the mosque will depend on the factors and mechanisms of an overall social change in the country. Social remittances from overseas Pakistanis have been an important source of bringing in new ideas and change (Bolognani 2007; So 2010). These can also be an important factor in changing people's attitude toward women's access to the mosque. However, it remains to be seen if these can bring about such a change at a wider level in the near future.

Since there is not much control of the government over mosque affairs in Pakistan, occasionally a few imams from mosques in big cities associated with particular sects have provoked conflicts through their sermons against other sects. A nexus between sectarianism (violent conflicts among different sects) and transnational terrorism (conflicts between radical Islamists with non-Muslims) is also known to exist (Abou Zahab and Roy 2004). However, in recent years, most sectarian violence has been caused by the Taliban against Shias and Sufis, which has different dynamics than that of typical conflicts between various sects. In villages like Jhokwala, although all mosques belong to a specific sect, this does not suggest that local imams are active in sectarian conflicts. This situation seems to exist in all such villages where local imams from within the community are being appointed and the mosque administration is run by the community itself. The mosque administration runs through the notion of honesty and trust. There is no accountability of its financial management in a strict sense, which indicates that only trusted and well-reputed members of the community are selected as administrators. The concept of good deeds is linked to social welfare that is central to Muslims' association with the mosque. The sociospatial relationships around mosque space during natural disasters transcend ethnic and sectarian boundaries because Muslims feel a strong interplay between the world and the afterlife during these times.

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Notes

1. In addition to these studies on Pakistan, there is a great deal of literature on Pakistani diaspora that deals with similar issues (e.g. Shaw and Charsley 2006; Bolognani and Lyon 2011; Werbner 2013).
2. Most of the Arabic and Persian words in this report have used the spellings that are closer to their pronunciation in Pakistani languages or as used in anthropological writings.
3. Sunni Muslims follow four jurisprudence schools or interpretations of the religious law based on the Qur'an and *hadith*. Each jurisprudence school is known as *maslak* or *mazhab/madhab*, and is named after the four imams who founded these schools centuries ago. While Sunnis consider all of these schools of thought as righteous ones; a Sunni has to follow only one of these. Although the definition of imam and the rules of jurisprudence differ between Sunnis and Shias, a similar kind of approach is followed by the latter as well. By following the rules of jurisprudence, Muslims can interpret or adapt to new situations in the world. Salafis or Wahabis do not follow any imam specifically and believe in the literal interpretation of the Qur'an and *hadith*.
4. Most names are pseudonyms.
5. Before the widespread use of clocks, people in rural areas used an indigenous time measurement system in which a unit of time, called *pah'r*, was roughly equal to three hours (cf. Mughal 2014a).

Notes on contributor

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